LAHOMA

BY

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS

(Continued.)

When Bill came Wilfred told of his experiences on his quarter section. How he had broken the prairie land, put in his crops, watched them wither away in the terrible dry months, roughed it through the winters, tried again, fought through another drought, staked all on the next spring's planting, raised a half crop, paid off his chattel mortgage, tried again—succeeded.

"I've stayed right with it," he said gravely. "Of course, they required me to stay on the land only during certain months every year. But I stayed with it all the time, and I studied it, and when I failed, as I did year after year, I failed each time in a different way because I learned my lesson. And when I'd wailed off the cause of each failure one by one, seemed like there opened before me a broad, clear way that led right into the goal I'd been seeking from the first day. Then I closed out all my deals and looked and saw that everything was trim and ready for winter—and got my horse and started for Greer country."

"And glad we are!" cried Bill Atkins. "I hope you can stay a long time."

"That depends—Lahoma is well, I suppose?"

"The picture of health—when she left," Brick declared admiringly, "and the prettiest little gal this side of the angels. And when you get down sick as I done once from causes incidental to being made of flesh and blood, and she come and laid her hand on my burning forehead, her touch always made me think of an angel's wing."

"Lahoma's not here?" Wilfred asked anxiously.

"Not now, nor for some time," answered Brick.

"I reckon, Wilfred, you just traveled here to take a look at the country where you used to herd cattle?" questioned Brick.

"That wasn't my reason. Principally I wanted to see Lahoma and incidentally my brother."

"Your brother? He ain't in these parts, is he?"

"No," ruefully, "but I expected him to be. When I left home to turn cowpuncher I didn't tell anybody where I'd gone, but just before I left for Oklahoma to turn farmer I wrote to my brother. And about a month ago, seeing things clearing up before me, I asked him to meet me here at Tent City. He's interested in new towns; he's employed by a rich man to plant hardware stores, and I thought he might find an opening here. He came on and was here several weeks with a party of sightseers from Chicago, but he left with them about a week ago."

Willock sat suddenly erect. "Couldn't have been that Sellimer crowd, I reckon, from Chicago?"

"Yes; Mrs. Sellimer and her daughter and some of their friends."

Willock whistled loudly. "And that up and down looking chap in the gold nose glasses was your brother?"

"Never thought of that," Bill exclaimed; "although he had your name, he looked so different. But now that you've laid aside your cowboy rigging I guess you could sit in his class down at the bottom of it."

Willock was uneasy. "I was told," he observed, "and I took the trouble to get datty on the subject, that them Sellimers—the mother and daughter and the herd they drift with—is of the highest pedigree Chicago can produce. It sort of jolts me to find out that anybody we know is kin to the bunch."

Wilfred laughed without bitterness. "Don't let my kinship to Brother Edgerton disturb your ideal. We're so different that we parted without saying goodby. Miss Sellimer is the girl whose letters I was carrying about with me when I first saw you. She refused me because I was as poor as herself. So you see the whole bunch is out of my class."

Wilfred moved uneasily. "Has Lahoma made their acquaintance, then?"

"It looks like it, don't it?"

"What looks like it?" Wilfred asked with sudden sharpness.

"Why, her going off with 'em to spend the winter in high life."

"But I thought—but I came here to see Lahoma!" cried Wilfred, unable to conceal his disappointment. "I have a good farm now not very far from Oklahoma City, and—well, being alone there year after year, a fellow gets to imagining a great many things"— He stopped abruptly.

"That's so," Willock agreed sympathetically. "I ain't a-saying that if Lahoma 'd been like me and Bill she mightn't of liked farming with you first class. But she was born as an associate of high men and women, not cows and chickens. It's the big world for her, and that's where she's gone."

There was silence, broken presently by Bill. "I'm glad you've come, sure!"

Presently the door opened, and the Indian chief Red Feather glided into the apartment with a grunt of salutation. He spread his blanket in a corner and sat down, turning a stolid face to the fire.

"Don't pay no attention to him," remarked Willock, as if speaking of some wild animal. "He comes once a year to see us, and he isn't troublesome if you feeds and sleeps him and don't try to lay your hand on him."

Bill Atkins rose. "But I always light up when he comes," he remarked, reaching stiffly for a lantern. "Are you hungry, Wilfred?" he asked.

Wilfred declared that he was not in the least hungry.

"I'm afraid you're disappointed, son," observed Willock, filling his pipe anew.

Wilfred turned to him with a frank smile. "Brick—it's just awful! It's what comes from depending on something you've no right to consider a sure thing. I never thought of this love without Lahoma in it. How did she get acquainted with Annabel—and with my brother?"

"It come about, son. I see at once that the bunch of 'em was from the big world. I come home and told Bill. 'Them's the people to tow Lahoma out into life,' says I. So they invited her to spend the winter with them, the Sellimers did, and show her city doings."

"Yes, but how did it come about?"

"Nothing more natural. I goes over to their tent and I tells them of the curiosities and good points of these mountains and gets 'em to come on a sort of picnic to explore. So here they comes, and they gets scattered, what with Bill and Lahoma and me taking different ways. They liked Lahoma first time they see her, as a matter of course. And so that Miss Sellimer she gets separated from all the rest, and I shows her a dandy hiding place where nobody couldn't find her, and I shows her what a good joke it would be to pretend to be lost. So I leaves her there to go to tell her crowd she dares 'em to find her. Are you listening?"

"Of course."

"Well, while she was setting there waiting to be searched for of a sudden a great big Injun in a blanket and feathers and red paint jumps down beside her and grabs her and picks her up, and about as quick as she knew anything she was gagged and bound and being bore along through the air. I reckon it was a terrible moment for her. Now, there is a crevice in the top of the mountain that nobody don't never explore because it's just a crack in the rock that ain't to be climbed out of without a ladder. So the Injun carries her there and lets her down with a rope that it seems he must of had handy somewhere, and he puts out, and there she is in a holler in the mountain, not able to move or cry out no more than if she'd been captured by a regular highwayman."

Wilfred stared at Willock in complete bewilderment. Willock chuckled.

"There was a terrible time," remarked Bill.

"Dark was a-coming on before the party got plumb scared," Willock continued, "but they brushed and combed that mountain looking for the poor lost lady, and as I tells 'em she's a-hiding a-purpose they think it a pore sort of joke till midnight catches 'em mighty serious. It must of been awful for pore Miss Sellimer, all bound and gagged in that horrible way, but it takes heroic treatment to get some cures, and so Lahoma went with 'em to spend the winter."

"But the Indian"—

"Needn't think about him no more, son; we got no more use for that Injun. Well, on the next day Lahoma is looking everywhere, being urged on by me, and, lo and behold, when she comes to that crevice—looked like she couldn't be induced to go there of her own will, but it was brung about finally—what does she see but a tomahawk lying right at the edge what must have been dropped there recent or the crowd would have saw it the day before. It come to her that Miss Sellimer is a prisoner down below. She looks, but it's too dark to see nothing. Not telling nobody for fear of starting up false hopes, she gets a light and lowers it—and there is that miserable young woman, bound and gagged and her pretty dress all tore. Lahoma jumps to her feet to raise the cry, when she discovers a ladder under a bowlder which the Injun must have put there meaning to descend to his victim when the coast was clear. Down she skins and frees Miss Sellimer, who's half dead, pore young lady! Lahoma comes up the ladder and meets me, and I carries her out just like a feather. Well, can't you imagine the rest? I reckon if Miss Sellimer lives a thousand years she'll never forget the awfulness of that big Injun and the angel sweetness of the little gal that saved her. Why, if Lahoma had asked for the rings off her fingers she could have had 'em."

Wilfred rose and went to stare at the darkness from the small square window. Not a word was spoken for some time. At last the silence was broken by the Indian—"Ugh!" grunted Red Feather.

"Just so!" remarked Wilfred, with exceeding dryness.

"What are you thinking, Wilfred?" demanded Brick Willock.

"I'd have thought Lahoma would recognize the ladder."

"So she done, but couldn't the Injun have stole my ladder and carried it to that bowlder? Just as soon as Miss Sellimer was well enough to travel, nothing couldn't hold her in these parts, and that's why your brother had to leave before seeing you—he's setting to Miss Sellimer, and if Lahoma don't git him away from her I reckon he's a goner!"

Bill Atkins spoke vaguely. "It was'nt none of my doings."

Wilfred looked steadily at Willock. "What about your whiskers?"

"Oh, as to them, it was like old times. You takes a cloth and cuts it out—painted red. Pshaw! What are we talking of? Bill, let's show him her letter. What do you say?"

"I reckon it wouldn't hurt," Bill conceded. "Who'll read it?"

"Let Wilfred do the deed," Willock suggested.

Wilfred drew the only stool in the room up beside the lantern, and Bill and Brick disposed themselves on the bench. Red Feather, his beady eyes fastened on the young man's face, sat gracefully erect, apparently alert to all that was going on.

CHAPTER XI.

Writing Home.

"DEAR Brick and Bill:

"I don't know what to tell first. It's all so strange and grand—the people are just people, but the things are wonderful. When I lived in the cove—it seems a long, long time ago—my thoughts were always away from dirt floors and cookstoves and cedar logs and washpans. But the people in the big world keep their minds tied right up to things—only the things are finer—they are marble floors and magnificent restaurants and houses on what they call the 'best streets.' At meals there are all kinds of little spoons and forks, and they think to use a wrong one is something dreadful.

"They have certain ways of doing everything, and just certain times for doing them, and if you do a wrong thing at a right time or a right thing at a wrong time it shows you are from the west.

"Miss Sellimer is so nice to me. I told her right at the start that I didn't know anything about the big world, and she teaches me everything. I'd be more comfortable if she could forget about my saving her life, but she never can, and is so grateful it makes me feel that I'm enjoying all this on false pretenses, for you know my finding her was only an accident. Her mother is very pleasant to me—much more so than to her. Bill, you know how you speak to your horse, sometimes, when it acts contrary? That's the way Miss Sellimer speaks to her mother at times. However, they don't seem very well acquainted with each other. Of course if they'd lived together in a cove for years they'd have learned to tell each other their thoughts and plans, but out in the big world there isn't time for anything except to dress and go.

"I'm learning to dress. I used to think a girl could do that to please herself—but no; the dresses are a thousand times more important than the people inside them. It wouldn't matter how wise you are if your dress is wrong, nor would it matter how foolish if your dress is like anybody else's. A person could be independent and do as she pleased, but she wouldn't be in society, because they don't know anything about being independent; they want to be governed by their things. A poor person isn't cut off from society because he hasn't money, but because he doesn't know how to deal with high things, not having practiced amongst them. It isn't because society people have lots of money that they stick together, but because all of them know what to do with the little forks and spoons.

"It is like the dearest, jolliest kind of game to me to be with these people and say just what they say and like what they like and act as they act—and that's the difference between me and them; it's not a game to them; it's deadly earnest. They think they're living!

"Miss Sellimer is witty and talented and from the way she treats me I know she has a tender heart. And her mother is a perfect wonder of a manager, and never makes mistakes except such as happen to be the fad of the hour. And Mr. Edgerton Compton could be splendid, for he seems to know everything.

"What they are working at now is all they expect to work at as long as they live—and it takes awfully hard work to keep up with their set. They call it 'keeping in the swim,' and let me tell you what it reminds me of—a strong young steer out in a 'tank,' using all the strength he has just to keep on top of the water instead of swimming to shore and going somewhere. Society people don't go anywhere; they use all their energy staying right where they are, and if one of them loses grip and goes under—goodness!

"I know what Mrs. Sellimer has set her heart on because she has already begun instructing me in her ideals. She wants her daughter to marry a rich man, and Mr. Edgerton Compton isn't rich, he only looks like he is. Mrs. Sellimer feels that she's terribly poor

"No use to stare at that there word."

herself; it's the kind of poverty that has all it wants to eat and wear, but hasn't as many horses and servants as it wants.

"I feel like I oughtn't to be wasting my time telling about my friends when there are all these wonderful lights and carpets and decorations and conveniences so much more interesting. We are in a Kansas City hotel and whenever you want hot water, instead of bringing a bucketful from the spring and building a fire and sitting down to watch it simmer, you just turn a handle and out it comes, smoking, and whenever you want ice water you touch a button and give a boy 10 cents.

(To be Continued.)

About 300 employes of the Springfield Metal Body Company at Springfield, went on strike for an eight-hour day and recognition of the union.

SEWER PROPOSALS.

The Paving and Sewer Commission will receive proposals for the construction of sundry sewers, as per maps and profiles in City Engineer's Office, until Thursday evening, Oct. 28, 1915, at 8 o'clock at office of secretary, Room No. 22, City Hall. The right to reject any or all proposals is reserved. A check equivalent to five per cent. of the amount of bid is required.
PAVING & SEWER COMMISSION
By Bernard Keating, Secretary.
October 25, 1915. b*

Farmer Wants Cent a Word

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